

Nurse Navigator Core Competencies

An update to reflect the evolution of the role

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BACKGROUND: The Oncology Nursing Society published Oncology Nurse Navigator (ONN) Core Competencies in 2013. However, a 2016 role delineation study (RDS) indicated that the role had evolved since their release. The RDS also indicated that a growing number of nurse navigators have extensive oncology and navigation experience.

OBJECTIVES: The update to the competencies was undertaken to identify current responsibilities of ONNs and differentiate novice from expert practice.

METHODS: A list of competencies was developed based on a literature review, evaluation of the 2013 competencies, and input from six expert ONNs. These draft competencies were vetted through field and expert review, with subsequent updates.

FINDINGS: The 2017 competencies include 52 competencies: 40 novice and 12 expert. Two models are included to help elucidate professional practice and show the impact ONNs have across the cancer care continuum. These can be used to more clearly define the role and optimize efficacy.

KEYWORDS

navigation; nurse navigator; care coordination; competencies

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CARE COORDINATION IS AN ESSENTIAL FUNCTION of the oncology nurse role. The Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) *Statement on the Scope and Standards of Oncology Nursing Practice: Generalist and Advanced Practice* states that “the oncology nurse functions as a patient care coordinator and collaborates with other healthcare team members to provide high-quality interdisciplinary care” (Brandt & Wickham, 2013, p. 10). However, barriers to timely and effective care have been identified, such as difficulty navigating the healthcare system and accessing needed resources, which can be outside the usual scope of practice for many staff nurses (Blaseg, Daugherty, & Gamblin, 2014; Lubejko et al., 2017). ONS maintains that oncology nurse navigators (ONNs) are key in meeting the needs of patients and their caregivers while providing evidence-based, cost-effective, and quality patient-centered care. ONNs can help achieve the goal of reduced morbidity and mortality by eliminating barriers to timely access to cancer care (ONS, 2015).

In 2011, ONS recognized that a growing number of oncology nurses identified oncology nurse navigation as their primary role function. ONS developed the initial ONN Core Competencies in 2013, supported by data collected in the ONS ONN Survey; ONN Role Delineation Study (RDS) (Brown et al., 2012); and the “ONS, the Association of Oncology Social Work, and the National Association of Social Workers Joint Position on the Role of Oncology Nursing and Oncology Social Work in Patient Navigation” (ONS, 2010). Additional anecdotal information was obtained from the ONS Nurse Navigator Special Interest Group (SIG). With all this information, ONS was able to define the role, support growth and standardization of the role, and describe the knowledge and skills an ONN should have or develop during the first year or two in the role (McMullen et al., 2016). Forty core competencies defining the ONN role were developed and organized into four categories: professional role, education, coordination of care, and communication.

In 2015, the Nurse Navigation SIG (now called the ONS Navigation and Care Coordination Community) leadership team collaborated with the ONS Board of Directors to draft a new position statement. The ONS (2015) position statement on the role and qualifications of ONNs said that ONNs should do the following: